A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INYO COUNTY FREE LIBRARY OF CALIFORNIA

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper tells, very briefly, the history of the Inyo County Free Library of California, tracing its development from the establishment by the board of supervisors in 1913 to the present. The founding of various branches, contacts with other libraries, and changes in library administration are some of the topics referred to. Through the use of original documents, including letters, reports, and statistical records, the role of the public in the life of the library is examined. The purpose of the paper is to illustrate the intrinsic value of the library in its local community, and the extent that value is recognized by the members of that community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE.....1

CHAPTER 1: THE COUNTY FREE LIBRARY IDEA.....4

CHAPTER 2: SPREADING SERVICE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY.....11

CHAPTER 3: MODERNIZING AND REACHING OUT.....19

CONCLUSION: A LIBRARY FOR ALL.....25

NOTES.....32

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....33

APPENDIX A: RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT MAINTENANCE OF A COUNTY FREE LIBRARY FOR INYO COUNTY.....34

APPENDIX B: INYO COUNTY LIBRARIANS.....35

APPENDIX C: INYO COUNTY LIBRARY BRANCHES.....36

APPENDIX D: LIBRARY QUESTIONNAIRES.....37

APPENDIX E: TEXT OF SELECTED LETTERS.....40

APPENDIX F: COMPARATIVE CIRCULATION STATISTICS BY DECADE.....43

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

I embarked upon the pursuit of this Master's Degree as a way of furthering my education, and so I would have the necessary background to serve the people of Inyo County to the best of my ability. I have tried whenever possible in the course of my studies in this program to incorporate local concerns in the issues I have been asked to examine.

For this reason, I feel that an examination of the history of our own county library is a useful topic for my Final Project. There are two reasons for this: First, no formal history of the library exists. There are masses of documents in the library's files, including reports, letters and memorabilia, but nothing coherent has been made of them. It is my ambition eventually to compile the library's history in book form, incorporating many more details than is possible in the space available to me here, and this paper will be expanded to form the basis of that book. I plan to make this manuscript available in the library for the local community to use.

The second reason for choosing this project is that it is an illustration of the Humanities in action. A library is very much the product of human wants and needs. It is the expression of a community's desire that the unique history of the culture and all its accomplishments not be forgotten. It is my purpose to show that the people of Inyo County, isolated from the cultural advantages inherent in an urban area as they are, have always appreciated the special advantages a free public library can bestow. The creation of the Inyo County Free Library was a direct result of public pressure, as was the creation of every other county free library in the state, and it was due

entirely to the tireless efforts of a few people, both locally and on the state level, that the library came to be a reality. It is this history that I will explore in this paper.

I will be using original documents almost exclusively. As I have already stated, there has never been a formal written history of the library, nor has it been mentioned in the books written about the area. Therefore, I am using the library's own archives, putting letters, annual reports, and other documents into chronological order, and getting my information from them.

My approach is a narrative one. I am telling a story and will include dates where pertinent, but in the main, I am trying to catch the flavor of the area and the problems faced by those who would provide it with library service. Inyo County is somewhat distinctive in its isolation from the rest of what has been termed the "California culture". The people tend to be conservative, although with the advent of worldwide communications, especially through television, a more cosmopolitan outlook is slowly emerging. This isolation, and the slightly suspicious attitude it can foster, is an obstacle to those who would establish a library in the first place, as the barriers of closed minds have to be breached, as well as those of distance and terrain. I feel that the library has been a significant factor in opening those closed minds, as I will try to show in this narration.

The story unfolds in three parts: First, I will explore the idea of the free library and what it can mean to the population of a region. Included in this section is the story of the founding of the Inyo County Free Library; Second, I will give an account of the expansion of the

library throughout the county, with a sketch of branches, stations, school libraries, and the bookmobile. In this section I will include the contract between Inyo and Mono Counties for library service in the latter county. The third section will bring the library up to date, and will include the county's experiment with a joint directorship of the library by three paraprofessionals, and tell of the library's more active participation with other jurisdictions to enhance service. The conclusion will show what the library has meant and still means to the community, using circulation statistics, letters of appreciation, and questionnaire results.

There are several appendices in which are provided the full text of the original board resolution forming the Inyo County Free Library, and a list of all the county librarians. There is a list of the branches and outlets, showing date started and, if possible, when closed. The full texts of the two questionnaires circulated by the library plus three representative letters from patrons are included as is an overview of population and circulation statistics from the founding of the library.

CHAPTER 1

THE COUNTY FREE LIBRARY IDEA

The idea behind the county free public libraries came from one remarkable man, California State Librarian James L. Gillis. Born in Iowa in 1857, raised in the wilds of Nevada until he was ten years old, Gillis loved books even then. Even after his family moved to Sacramento in 1867, and he was immersed in the activities of growing up and finding a career in life, he did not forget how important books and learning could be to those in the vast empty areas of the rural West. When he was serving as deputy in the State Library and clerk in the Legislature, he was struck by the magnificence of the State Library and how deserted it was. His thoughts one noon in the empty library were, "All this, and open only to the Legislature and other state officials! What a waste! And there are all those people out in the state wanting library service!... What would I give to be in charge here and show what could really be done."[1]

James Gillis did become State Librarian in 1899 and his first move was to organize the State Library in a more professional and less political manner, by putting the trained librarians on the staff under the civil service regulations, among other reforms. He then set about realizing his dream of bringing free library service to all the people in the state. Since more Californians lived outside of towns than within towns, he rejected the municipality, and settled upon the county as the ideal vehicle for bringing equal service to all the people. And since the county would be the funding agency, through the collection of taxes, the service could be made free to all citizens therein.

Beginning in 1909, a special organizer was sent out to all the counties to explain and promote the county libraries. Mr. Gillis chose Miss Harriet G. Eddy for her teaching ability (she was not a trained librarian, although she had been in charge of the Elk Grove branch of the Sacramento County Library which was located in the high school, of which she was principal), and also for her indefatigable ability to travel. The story of her travels from 1909 to 1918 is an awe-inspiring tale of train schedules, horse and buggy, automobile journeys and even a riverboat. She was constantly on the road during the spring and summer months of those years, for that was when the spending priorities for the following year were set by the county boards of supervisors. One of the places she visited, in 1913, was Inyo County.

The original stimulus for the county library in Inyo was the Bishop Women's Improvement Club (which is still going strong, celebrating its 90th anniversary this year). The president of the club heard Miss Eddy speak at a state convention, and issued the invitation for her to come to Inyo to help them get the county library established by the board of supervisors. In the words of Anne Margrave, a former Inyo County Librarian:

> No other portion of the state seemed more in need of the help which a county library might bring. Cut off from the outside world by the highest range of the Sierras to the west and north, by mountainous deserts to the east and south, with no highways, only recently connected with the south by railway, their business and social connections with a city were with San Francisco, over two days' journey away, and the community remained a pioneer society in most respects. Book-lovers bought their books as occasion offered and Owens Valley was a happy hunting ground for the book agent.[2]

Miss Eddy was at that time, which was the summer of 1913, engaged in the organization of county libraries in San Bernardino and Contra Costa Counties, but thought "it seemed possible to include Inyo in the July schedule, although it meant an almost impossible crowding of the schedule."[3] This was an understatement, for sure, remembering the conditions of travel in those days, with train schedules uncertain and highways almost non-existent. Indeed, the prospect of going from Martinez in the Bay Area to San Bernardino with a "side trip" to Independence in the space of a few days would be daunting even today.

As a later county library organizer stated, "Organizing for county libraries gave constant opportunity to inform people about the resources of the State Library and their privileges in regard to using it."[4] That there were many misconceptions about the county libraries in those early days is illustrated by the same individual when she adds, "It was a means also of steadily breaking down the false idea frequently voiced, at that time, of 'State Control' and substituting a mental attitude of friendliness toward this state institution which was theirs to use wherever they might live in California."[5]

The legal requirement for setting up a county library was for the board of supervisors to formally make a Resolution of Intention to start the library, publish that intention in the local newspapers for from two weeks to two months, then hold a public hearing on the subject, at which time they would vote to establish the library. This process required much personal contact for the library organizer with local library advocates, members of the board and other influential county citizens, including major taxpayers. The method was essentially a political one

and the usual practice was to influence citizens by persuasion, illustration, statistics, and so forth in the hope that the public hearing and resultant vote by the supervisors would be favorable.

In the case of Inyo County, there was, and still is, a disparity in character and sentiment between the northern and southern parts of the county. The north, consisting of the towns of Bishop and Big Pine, with the newer residents of the county, tended to be more liberal-minded and open to change. The region from Independence and south, which held many long-time county residents, as well as having the lesser population density, was more conservative and failed to see the necessity for something as "frivolous" as a library. Miss Eddy was told that the northern part of the county was a safe bet to support the county library, but she would have to get the backing of some big tax-payers in the south for the concept to be accepted. Therefore, after the resolution of intention was passed on July 7, 1913, Miss Eddy's work was just beginning. The public hearing was set for the board meeting of September, so there were almost 3 months for library advocates to gather the support needed for passage.

September 5 found Miss Eddy again in Inyo County, in the town of Lone Pine at the home of Mr. Stewart, a wealthy sheep rancher whose support she had been told was essential to the establishment of the library. She quickly gained the support of his wife, who told her to come back that evening, after he had his dinner and a chance to relax. Doing as she was bid, Miss Eddy returned after supper and discussed the proposal with Mr. Stewart. He was in a talkative mood and did not comment about the library but began to speak of his family.

He told of his son who had graduated from the University of Nevada in Reno, and whose picture, hanging on the wall, looked familiar to Miss Eddy, though she didn't know why. He then asked Miss Eddy where she had been born: "When I said, 'Michigan, near Detroit,' he said he had a sister living in Wayne. I asked her name and when he said 'Deming,' my mouth fell open and I stared at them, for the mystery was solved! I gasped, 'You don't mean to tell me that you are Aunt Kate and Uncle Johnny!' And then it was their turn to stare and gasp. 'Of course we are, but who are you and how do you know us?'"[6] Miss Eddy explained that she had roomed with the nieces of the Stewarts, the photo of their son had hung on the apartment wall, and that the nieces had often spoken of "Aunt Kate and Uncle Johnny" in California. The conversation went on long into the night, as reminiscences flew thick and fast but the library was not mentioned again.

However, that visit was crucial to the Inyo County Free Library. Miss Eddy's own words tell the rest of the tale:

> The next morning when I went downstairs, the storekeeper said, "What did you ever do to Uncle Johnny last night?" I was frightened as I asked, "Why?" He answered, "He was on the street at 7 o'clock this morning, circulating a petition for the library, with his own name at the top of the list. And of course everyone else in town has signed." I knew that my work there was over. Later I went to say good-bye to them, but no mention was made of the library. It was not necessary. The next week, September 15, the petition was in the hands of the supervisors and the resolution establishing the library was unanimously passed. Next day a county librarian was appointed, and she began work in two weeks, about the swiftest record any county ever made.[7]

Miss Margrave's account of that meeting illustrates the power of popular support in the formation of the library:

> At the meeting of the Board, September 15th, 1913, petitions were presented from all the Owens Valley towns except Big

> Pine. Their long list of names was delayed in the mails, and did not reach Independence in time for the meeting. However, the delegation of citizens, the number of petitions, and the ready answer to all questions on the part of Miss Eddy, changed the vote of the Supervisors from three for the first to five for the final resolution...[8]

The librarian originally appointed by the board of supervisors, Miss Ida G. Munson, was found to be unqualified and never took up her position. The appointment was revoked the next day, and Miss Jennie May Brown was appointed in her stead, at the salary of $1000. There is no record of Miss Brown's background, but as the State Librarian had to recommend the people appointed to serve as County Librarians, she probably came from out of the county. It is most likely that she was a librarian from another jurisdiction.

Miss Margrave notes that the county's estimate of the cost of library service was somewhat low. "It was promised that the State Library would furnish one thousand books and unlimited service, but that the county would use a 'portion of the money in the purchase of books which will belong to the county.' The estimate of $2500 for the entire service, including the librarian's salary, and $800 to $900 for books, indicates the modest ideas of the founders."[9]

Evidently the altitude of the county was too much for Miss Brown and she left, after being in ill health for most of her term, on May 2, 1916, on a leave of absence, from which she never returned. Miss Helen E. Vogelson was acting county librarian during the time of Miss Brown's leave, but she resigned, as did Miss Brown formally, on September 18, 1916. Miss Blanche Chalfant was appointed county librarian, and arrived on October 9, 1916, to take up the work. "She was a native daughter of Inyo, her father having established the Inyo Independent in Independence

in 1870, and having lived many years in Independence and Bishop."[10] Her brother, W.A. Chalfant, also a well known citizen of Inyo County, was founder of the Inyo Register newspaper and author of many histories of the area, among them The Story of Inyo. His support, through his newspaper, proved very valuable to the library through the years.

Miss Margrave, writing from her perspective of twenty years after the founding, speaks of the hardships of establishing library service in an isolated and rural area:

> The position of these first librarians was a lonely one; there was no one of their own profession, or with any appreciation of what librarianship meant, within a long distance; hotels were primitive, and planned for men only, yet they were usually the only places to live. They shared offices with the Board of Supervisors, and were obliged to make way on the occasion of the Supervisor's [sic.] meetings. In visiting branches, they often found no way of going by public conveyance, and had to hire cars, ride with a mail carrier, or beg a ride. None of these methods proved very satisfactory; distances are so great in Inyo County that automobile hire mounts very fast.[11]

That the early librarians persisted is a testimony to both their dedication to their calling and to the perceived need of the people of the county. The librarian was always welcomed and what she had to offer was prized by those culture-starved people. This gave her a sense of accomplishment which outweighed the physical discomforts encountered in the course of her duties. It was this same feeling of pride of fulfillment, together with the support of so many people who saw the worth of universal library service that helped Miss Eddy in her initial task of establishing the county library system. And it is that very same feeling that today sustains librarians in their struggle to bring education and information to those in the adverse conditions of poverty, and geographical and cultural isolation.

CHAPTER 2

SPREADING SERVICE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY

Inyo County is the second largest county in California, with an area of over 10,000 square miles. Even today, with 18,450 inhabitants, the population density is a little over one person per square mile. In 1913 and 1914, when there were only around 7,000 people living in the county, the elbow-room was even greater.

Compounding the difficulties inherent in dealing with a low population density and the great distances between population centers was the primitive state of transportation. As I have stated in the previous chapter, even in the 1930s, roads were in poor condition and public conveyance non-existent in the remote areas where some of the county's citizens lived.

Therefore, the most efficient method for reaching the most people for the least expense was the small library station, or reading room. This could be located in one room, or even one corner of a room. Stations were set up in hotels, mining offices and, in one case, one corner of a market. Stations differ from branches in that they offer fewer services at the location, and have nothing like the collection that a branch can have. However, patrons of a station can avail themselves of the county library's full services by mail. If time is not pressing, a remote patron can have the answer to any question, and access to any book available to anyone living in a more populous area.

From the beginning, then, the Inyo County Library has consisted primarily of branches, and indeed, the largest library in the county is a branch. The Bishop Library is the oldest and largest of the county's

continuously active outlets. However, since it is not located in the county seat of Independence, it is not the headquarters of the library. Even though Bishop does more business with the people, due to the widespread nature of the system, all of the library's work is coordinated from Central in Independence.

The Bishop Library was first opened on November 22, 1913, and the dream of the Bishop Women's Improvement Club became a reality. The book lovers of Bishop had access to an unimaginable treasure trove through the sponsorship of the County Free Library. The early records are sketchy and, until the branch custodians became familiar with the policies and procedures involved in running a lending library, it appears there were some difficulties with lost books and records not being kept correctly.

The dates for the other branches in the system are: Big Pine, November 29, 1913; the branch in Independence, December 15, 1913; and Lone Pine, April 17, 1914. These are the only locations large enough to merit the title of "Branch", and have been in continuous operation since their founding. Of the four, Bishop is the largest, followed by Lone Pine in the south. Big Pine and Independence are approximately the same size, the designation of smallest passing back and forth between them during the 80 years they have been in existence.

The most challenging area of the county in terms of providing library service is the Death Valley region in the extreme southeastern portion of the county. This is mostly desert, interspersed by several mountain ranges, and is remote from the Owens Valley population centers. Even today, travel to the area is time-consuming, although it is

possible to travel from Independence through Death Valley to Shoshone and Tecopa, and return in the same day. In Miss Margrave's time, and even in the 1950s and 60s, it meant an overnight stay to visit the stations and schools in the desert. The library has always been committed to serving the remote areas, so the effort has been made continually to assure that they have the best inventory possible. Miss Margrave's report articulates what has been the library's guiding principle since the first: "...we think these small places need the library even more than the larger ones."[12]

There have always been stations at Death Valley and Shoshone, although the locations have moved around. At the present there is a station at the Furnace Creek residents' area, which mainly services the Park Service personnel and the elementary school there. The Shoshone-Tecopa area has been served by either location or both, at different times. The two little towns are just seven miles apart, but their history and style are very different.

Shoshone is a center for whatever mining activity exists in the area. When the mines shut down, the town declines, and vice versa. Tecopa's main industry is the hot spring in the area and serving the tourists which this feature attracts. The population is transient on a seasonal basis, with the same people coming back each year. At the present time, the library station is located in Tecopa, since local mines have ceased operation and many of Shoshone's residents have left the area, while the "snowbirds" make Tecopa a regular stop.

In the Round Valley area, in northern Inyo County, there was a library station in the school from the very beginning. At first,

records of individual schools were not kept, but the first list of schools, in 1924-25, includes Round Valley School, along with 26 others in the county, so it is safe to say that Round Valley enjoyed library service from the earliest formation of the county library.

Aside from a station at the U.S. Vanadium Mine in Pine Creek Canyon, which was established in 1944, residents of Round Valley had no regular library service until 1954, when Union Carbide Corporation donated space in the Rovana Recreation Hall for a library station. This was to service the company town of Rovana, located in western Round Valley, and is still in existence today, even though Union Carbide no longer operates the mine or owns the housing in Rovana.

All other areas of the county have been served from time to time by stations or reading rooms or, for a brief period in the 1970s, by a part-time bookmobile. This was leased from the County Schools during the 12 weeks of summer, and traveled throughout the county. The service was terminated in 1978, after California's Proposition 13 tax-limitation law went into effect.

From forty-five branches in the early 20s, the Inyo County Free Library has stabilized at 7. With the advent of good roads, reliable automobiles and the relatively easy travel they promote, people have become used to driving to do their business and visiting the library is no exception. The branches in Bishop, Big Pine, Independence and Lone Pine; and the stations in Tecopa, Furnace Creek and Rovana are able to give full coverage to the county. And with computer technology continually expanding, it soon may not matter if one lives in a physically remote area. The library of the future will be even more

accessible than ever, from one's own home computer. This "Virtual Library" will be capable of giving the most personalized and rapid service of all.

From the beginning, the county library also serviced the schools in the county. The school districts paid the county library for making its books available to students, and there were several instances during the early years when the question arose whether a student was using library materials in the pursuit of studies, or for personal recreational use. Since payment was required for school use, this was a real concern in areas like Bishop, where the library was separate from the school. Students would come into the library just like non-student patrons and it was sometimes difficult to tell whether or not their business in the library was reimbursable.

In many outlying areas, this was not a problem, since the station was located in the school and the students were the only users of the service. With all the schools included in the county's library system, the library outlets numbered far more than they do at the present. Anne Margrave's 1923 report to the Board of Supervisors notes that "our branches, school and community, number forty-five. Some of these are very small collections, in very small places."[13]

In the same report, she notes the importance of close cooperation between the school and library and speaks of attending the Teachers Institute, in lieu of being able to visit all the schools on a regular basis. The difficulty of traveling about in the large county is a steady complaint in all the early librarians' writings. In Chapter 1, I quoted Miss Margrave's complaints on the subject. She was the most

vocal about the problem, as she was guiding the library through its early growing years. The inability to visit and supervise all the outlying stations and schools on a regular basis must have been a constant source of frustration to her.

Mary Cavitt's Annual Report of June 30, 1960, states that "During 1959-60 the Inyo County Free Library operated for the first time in almost 45 years without direct responsibility for supplying books and services in schools."[14] She notes that although it made an interesting change in the work of the library, "as is common in most California libraries, considerable time and money are spent on services and materials for students through the general library."[15]

This educational element has always been one of the library's chief missions. A library is not merely a place to go to get the latest best seller or other light recreational reading. Reading is the best way to educate oneself, and all of the information one can acquire at any library is the basis for ongoing enrichment. As early as 1916, Miss Vogelson's report to the Board of Supervisors stressed the educational role the library was to play in the life of the county:

> The public library is undoubtedly filling an important part in the everyday life of people today, and its function as an educational institution is practically as far reaching as that of the public school. Indeed, the free public library may fitly be termed a continuation school, because it takes up and carries forward so much of the work begun in the school, and brings to the surface and emphasizes the success, or the failure, of the school in its training of boys and girls, the future men and women, in their use of books which are the tools of an education never completed.[16]

In the early 1960s, the library's role in supplying information and knowledge in general was recognized more and more by the library community. Miss Cavitt's report of 1961 deals with this topic:

> Although the acquisition and circulation of books and other library materials may be considered the main service of the library we are finding an outstanding increase in informational services... several of the branches report the number of reference questions answered each year and the total is impressive.[17]

Inyo County's neighbor to the north, Mono County, did not organize a county free library in the 'teens, as so many did. Miss Eddy mentions the county briefly in her account of free library organizing. Speaking of the year 1917: "On a vacation trip in the high Sierras, I stopped in both Alpine and Mono Counties... Mono County had been approached while Inyo County was being organized. Not much interest was shown and it was not possible to stop in the county on the way out from Inyo. The 1917 visit showed that a contract with Inyo County could be effected later."[18]

There was occasional interest from some people in Mono County, even as early as 1922, but nothing came from this, either. Miss Margrave, who had been asked by Mono County residents to investigate the matter, found that the chairman of the Inyo County Board of Supervisors was "bitterly opposed" to a contract with Mono County. "It seems that Inyo County has given service to Mono County, in the care of persons committed to the county hospital, and the service was always the source of much annoyance, to such a degree, in fact, that Inyo County stopped the service... I asked Mr. Naylor if he did not think that a definite sum paid by contract for county-wide service, would do away with much of this trouble, but he was not at all sure that it would."[19]

After World War II, though, the old trouble had been forgotten, and the climate was right for a contract with Mono County. On August 4, 1947, a contract was made between the two counties and library service

was begun with five branches located in Benton, Bridgeport (Mono County Seat), Coleville, Hot Creek, and LeeVining. Since service to the schools was one of the primary reasons Mono County residents wanted the library service, stations were also set up in schools throughout the county. Miss Margrave found there were definite problems in furnishing Mono County with library service: "A difficulty in establishing county library work in Mono County is that all centers are small and are divided from one another by mountain ranges. The winter climate also has its place in hampering work... In no place except Bridgeport can we consider that we have adequate space or shelving."[20]

As they had been in the formation of the Inyo County Library, these obstacles were overcome, due to the dedication of the library staff and the community's belief in libraries. The Inyo County Library continued to serve both counties until a cooperative school and community district was formed in Mono County on July 1, 1965.

CHAPTER 3

MODERNIZING AND REACHING OUT

The sixties and seventies brought changes to the library. After the comparative tranquility of the forties and fifties, when the library's role was essentially to maintain existing service, trends which were gaining recognition within the wider library community were also penetrating the consciousness of the more isolated districts. The interlibrary loan concept, which had its roots in the State/County Library cooperation at the beginning of the century, was expanding to include all jurisdictions in the state.

With the development of the public library systems in the sixties, a patron in one library could request a book and, if the local library did not own that book, it could be borrowed from another system member library. This enhanced the ability of libraries to provide for their patrons' needs at a slightly lower cost, since they did not need to purchase books in which only one or two patrons would be interested. This is an especially valuable service for rural libraries, as their collections are limited by budget and shelf space.

Inyo County librarians recognized the worth of the public library system idea and joined the Inland Library System in 1972. The county citizens thereby gained access to the much larger collections of the Riverside and San Bernardino County Libraries, as well as that of the San Bernardino Public Library.

Interlibrary loan requests were first made by mail, but in the late seventies, a "TWX" machine was utilized. This was a device by which a request could be made by telephone and at the same time a paper

record of the transaction would be generated. With the arrival of affordable computer technology and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) database, Inyo County librarians added an Apple Computer and a modem to the Interlibrary Loan Department in 1984. By the end of the '80s, library patrons were amazed at the speed with which their requests could be answered.

As valuable as the interlibrary loan service was, the Inland Library System provided an even more useful advantage to a rural library: A system-wide reference center. Any member library may send a question to the reference center and one of the professional staff there will answer that question, utilizing the resources available in the metropolitan area. For an isolated library with no professionally educated staff and limited resources, this service is irreplaceable. The Inland Library System reference center is located within the headquarters of the Riverside City/County Library, and there is a major network of resources available to the system reference librarians, and the intellectual penalty for living in an uncrowded area becomes almost totally insignificant.

The public library system is recognized among librarians as a valuable tool for dealing with the problems of providing library and information service to widely scattered populations, and the idea has recently been taken a step further. The California State Library, recognizing the need to explore all available avenues for service in a time of fiscal constraints, is currently involved in an attempt to form a statewide multi-type library network.

Since 1989, the Networking Task Force has been studying and formulating various components of a system made up of many types of libraries: Public, academic, school, and private libraries of all types. The purpose of this network will be to enable libraries of all types to easily contact each other for the purpose of helping their patrons find the information they need. Interlibrary loan, reference answers, and professional expertise will all be included in this as-yet unrealized model. New electronic technology will be utilized to enable library users to access databases from many different sources.

The model which has come to be recognized as the most useful is the "virtual library", whereby anyone with a computer and a modem, either at home or from a library center, can gain admittance to the collections of libraries around the state, the nation and the world. It is an exciting possibility for using modern science for the benefit of libraries, and one that is uniquely appropriate for an isolated area like Inyo County. Distance from metropolitan centers will no longer be a factor in the ability of residents to gain the information they need, and a basic barrier to the delivery of service to isolated areas will be eliminated. The Inyo County Library staff, through the increased use of computerization for records and operations, is in the process of establishing the technology to utilize this method.

While all the innovative activity was going on in the library community as a whole, Inyo County continued to provide service to county residents, even as the winds of change blew around the edges of the county. There were several county librarians following Mary Cavitt. She left briefly in the early sixties, and the county had for the first

time, a male librarian, Richard Engen. He was replaced after about two years, by Miss Cavitt again, who continued until 1970. Jeanette Glynn built up the political and business collection, and Jay Ector followed her to conclude the seventies. During the terms of these last two individuals named, children's librarians were hired for the first time in the county's history.

The end of the 1970s saw California's Proposition 13 property tax limitation measure approved by the voters, with unhappy results for services which depend upon property tax for operating revenue. The Inyo County Library was no exception. In 1978, the library's operating budget was cut by 40%. The then current children's librarian resigned and her position was not filled.

In 1982, Mr. Ector resigned. Before he left, he presented an unusual proposal to the board of supervisors. He suggested that, in light of the county's straitened financial circumstances, a county librarian not be hired at that time, but that the responsibility for directing the library be given to three existing library employees: The branch supervisors in Bishop and Lone Pine, and the library business manager in Independence. The savings from this move should be put into the materials budget, which had been drastically cut. The board agreed to try the experiment, thus beginning what came to be known as the "Time of the Three".

The three directors did a commendable job of keeping the library functioning well. They worked well together and even introduced several innovations in library service. Due to their previous library experience, they were able to recognize which new techniques would

actually be helpful in library operations. It was during their time that computers were purchased for the library, and they also formed the habit of conducting frequent staff meetings to keep personnel throughout the valley acquainted with library circumstances. A newsletter was also begun at this time, to reach staff in outlying areas.

The only unfavorable element in the tripartite directorship was the very fact that there was no single person in authority. Outsiders were uncomfortable with the perceived lack of accountability, so in 1987 the county administrator placed the library under the directorship of a newly created community services department, comprising parks and recreation, the senior citizen programs, the county museum and the county library. For the first time in its history, the library ceased to be a county department under the ultimate control of a person who was knowledgeable about library operations.

In 1990, upon the retirement of one of the library directors, the decision was made to appoint a single administrator over the library, while still keeping the community services department as the parent department within county government.

This, then, brings the story of the Inyo County Library into the present. As a previous county librarian wrote, libraries are many things to people:

> People use the library to find out how their representatives vote; to get a copy of a legislative bill; to prepare for an examination for a job, a promotion, the armed services; to learn how to repair everything from home appliances to automobiles; for instruction on building garages, fireplaces, a bookcase; to learn more about raising and preserving food; to find out about the history of our country, the great ideas that shaped our civilization, or the facts on a controversial issue; and, not least, for a good book to read.[21]

Since 1913, the Inyo County Free Library has been striving to provide all these services and more to the citizens who live there, and to utilize the most modern library methods and technology available to achieve this goal. In the conclusion to this paper, I will use the evidence of circulation statistics, questionnaires and letters of support to show that the county inhabitants do recognize the importance of the library in providing cultural and informational resources in an area otherwise limited in human resources.

CONCLUSION

A LIBRARY FOR ALL

One advantage of living in an isolated area is that everybody knows everybody else. This can also be a disadvantage, if there are things about oneself that one would rather no one else knows. But when considering the value of a public institution, the fact that everyone knows about it, and has some idea of what it can offer, is a definite benefit when that institution is fighting for its subsistence against the forces of "fiscal responsibility". Since libraries are not money-making propositions, and since they are not mandated to be provided by the local government, there have been numerous times in the history of any library when it has to struggle for its very existence.

The Inyo County Library is no exception. The majority of the following quotations from county citizens, as well as the need for questionnaires, arose in response to appeals by the library leadership to the community when the library budget was threatened. The letters, together with the comments on the questionnaires, tell of citizens who value their library and also have some idea of the need for frugality in its operation.

One of the unpopular moves by the librarians in the seventies was the hiring of children's librarians. Several of the comments on the first questionnaire, circulated in 1978, urged the library to "get rid of the children's librarian." The public's perception was that another highly-salaried individual was unnecessary in this county.

The majority of the comments, however, were favorable to the library as a whole and the staff in particular. For example, from an

unsigned questionnaire, "Your people are eager to serve and find information for me. They have to 'milk' out of limited references... Compared to other libraries... your services are above average and your people some of the best." In this county, the public has never undervalued the staff's place in the successful operation of the library.

Many of the comments show that the people perceive the library to be much more than simply a place to store books. Former Bishop library supervisor Jean Jarvis stated "A library is a very important part of any community. Especially one as isolated as Bishop (Inyo County) is from large city libraries." And Rollin and Grace Enfield of Round Valley, north of Bishop, commented that the "Inyo County Library system makes it possible to live in rural Owens Valley and still be able to get necessary reference books." Finally, as Ella M. Wornbrock of Bishop observed, "A library (ideally a free one) is a necessity--not a luxury. The first thing Hitler did to dominate the people was to burn books and limit education."

The first questionnaire was circulated on the occasion of the county's cutting the library budget because of loss of revenue due to the passage of Proposition 13. The questionnaire asked if library users would accept fees being charged for various services. The county library system was originally set up as a free service so that all citizens of the state would have access to library service no matter what their financial status or place of residence.

When Proposition 13 passed and local governments began looking for places to raise revenue, it was inevitable that library user fees would

be considered. Jay Ector, in a fact sheet written about 1978, reiterated the library's position: "Libraries, as information clearinghouses, should be as open to citizens as possible, both as dispensers of knowledge and showcases of necessary, useful data. Efforts aimed at cost reduction should recognize the differing needs of individuals and limiting access to information should be as painless as possible to each."

Even so, when the questionnaires came back, the respondents favored charging fees by a 191 - 99 margin. Many people stated that they would rather pay a fee than go without library service. One or two did say that they thought their taxes already paid for the library, possibly not realizing that their taxes go into the county's general fund and that the Board of Supervisors must allocate this to all county services, with only a portion going to the library.

Probably due to the public support of the library as a free institution, the board of supervisors did not at that time require the library to charge any fees other than late fines and the cost of postage for receiving books from out of county. Appendix D gives the full text of the questionnaire and the compiled statistics.

In the spring of 1987, the library directors again circulated a questionnaire in anticipation of possible budget reductions. The results were tabulated and a fact sheet was compiled, giving percentages for each response, and listing all comments. After some questions about library usage, respondents were asked what services to cut if necessary, and what kinds of fees were acceptable. 66% indicated that they would pay a $1.00 fee plus postage for interlibrary loans (which was the only

fee proposed), and some said they would accept a 50-cent fee. Almost 26% said they would not accept any fee.

When asked about specific service cuts, 61.7% said not to cut anything, even though this was not an option on the questionnaire. Far fewer people, when pressed, said to cut interlibrary loan, open hours, new books, magazines and newspapers.

In the second questionnaire, the community was far less patient with the possibility of the library being cut. Many different variations of "Don't cut the library!" were furnished, and again the concept of the value of the library to a rural community was emphasized. A representative comment on this latter theme was, "Because this county does not have a college, I not only ask, I beg that you please keep this library open without limiting the hours or the lovely people that make this place work like a big library. I also have to ask you what our children would do for their school projects and other activities which occur from day to day?" The second questionnaire and tabulations are also given in Appendix D.

Besides the comments on the questionnaires, the board of supervisors and other county officials have received, over the years, letters in support of the library program in general. Included in Appendix E are the full texts of the letters quoted below.

One of the earliest examples of the usefulness of the library, occurred in 1924, during Anne Margrave's tenure. The County Agricultural Commissioner, John Wardle Dixon, had a problem which was solved by judicious use of library resources, so that he was moved to declare at the end of his letter of commendation, "With the help of a

lawyer and this book, the people of Sunland were saved, probably as much as it took to run the Library for the year."

At the present period in the library's history, in 1992, the low salaries of the library employees had become an issue among the staff and those members of the public who were aware of the situation. The county had hired a firm of consultants to survey the entire salary range in the county and the library employees were found to be at the very bottom of the group. Since 1992 was an election year, with three of the five supervisorial seats due to be filled, library services in general, and the salaries in particular, became a local election cause.

The local League of Women Voters chapter, which conducts Candidates' Nights to inform the public about election candidates and issues, decided to make the library question the one to which all candidates were required to respond at the meetings. The president of the League chapter, Yan Kinney, wrote to the Board of Supervisors and stated the League's position, which was, in part,

> The league would also like to remind the Board that while clerical skills are necessary for all employees in small public libraries, the broadest possible educational background is also necessary to give the public adequate assistance with their reference questions. We hope that the Board will take this into consideration in setting salary scales. We would appreciate the Board's consideration of bringing library salaries at least up to the level paid commensurate clerical positions in the county.

And Bea Ladinig, an English teacher at Bishop Union High School, wrote, also requesting that the Board "reward the work done by the library staff appropriately on a level commensurate with the invaluable service they perform."

The county administrator and board did listen to the public and, on October 1, 1992, all library staff, with the exception of the director and her secretary, were raised halfway to their ultimate salary ranges, with the commitment by the board to complete the raises on July 1, 1993. The secretary's salary was later raised as well. It is rare that a public agency is so valued that the citizens of the jurisdiction write to the administrators of that agency, urging a pay raise for its employees!

Inyo County has never had a large population and, when comparing circulation statistics with those of larger regions, the figures look insignificant. Even the total circulation of 129,911 for 1990 would probably only be considered a bad day's work at the Los Angeles Public Library. We can gauge a library's effectiveness and popularity by using statistics, though. We just have to compare them with the statistics from the same institution at different times.

For example, in 1913-14, Inyo County's population was 6,974, and the library's circulation that first year was 13,246, or almost 2 books checked out per person. In 1990, a population of 18,450 checked out the above mentioned 129,911 books, or 7 books per person. It is apparent that the people like their library and use it. The table in Appendix F, showing the statistics for each decade since the library was founded shows a fairly steady increase in library usage over the years. The times of declining usage either reflect the removal of responsibility for the schools from the library's service, or the general decline of the population of the county.

In conclusion, then, we have come to the end of this very brief recital of the history of library service for one rural county in California. I think that the history itself, as well as the testimonials of library users and the usage statistics, shows very clearly that good library service and appreciative library users go hand in hand. It is a cyclical progression of good library service encouraging more use by the public, which in turn generates more innovative service, giving the users more about which to be excited.

Good library service, like successful schools, is definitely a community effort, with the professionals doing their best to provide the service, and the public bringing its insight and enthusiasm to bear on how they use that service. As long as this is clearly understood, there will continue to be quality library service in Inyo County.

NOTES

(1) Harriet G. Eddy, County Free Library Organizing in California, 1909-1918.

(2) Inyo County Free Library History July 1913 - January 1932, p. 1.

(3) Eddy, op. cit., 57.

(4) Henshaw, May Dexter, County Library Organizing, 5.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Eddy, op. cit., 59.

(7) Ibid., 60.

(8) Margrave, op. cit., 4.

(9) Ibid., 7.

(10) Ibid., 20.

(11) Ibid., 19.

(12) Margrave, Report. Op. cit.

(13) Margrave, Anne, Report of the Inyo County Free Library for the Year Ending June 30, 1923.

(14) Cavitt, Mary, Forty-seventh Annual Report of the Inyo County Free Library, July 1, 1959 to June 30, 1960.

(15) Ibid.

(16) Vogelson, Helen E., Report to the Board of Supervisors, July 31, 1916.

(17) Cavitt, Mary, Forty-eighth Annual Report of the Inyo County Free Library, July 1, 1960 to June 30, 1961.

(18) Eddy, Op. cit., 106-7.

(19) Margrave, Anne, Letter to Milton J. Ferguson, California State Librarian, April 25, 1922.

(20) Margrave, Anne, Report to the Mono County Board of Supervisors, July 31, 1948.

(21) Glynn, Jeannette E., Letter to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors, May 7, 1976.

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APPENDIX A: RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF A COUNTY FREE LIBRARY FOR INYO COUNTY

WHEREAS, It is fitting and just for the best interest and welfare of the people of Inyo County, that they be given every proper privilege for education, culture and pleasure; and

WHEREAS, By an act entitled "An Act to provide for the establishment and maintenance of county free libraries in the State of California, and repealing an act entitled, "An act to provide county library systems," approved April 12, 1909, and all acts and parts of acts in conflict with this act", approved February 25th, 1911, the board of supervisors of any county may establish a county free library; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors of Inyo County has taken the necessary steps prescribed by law preliminary to the establishment of a county free library; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of Inyo County, State of California, exercises its powers prescribed in said act, and that it does hereby establish a county free library for the County of Inyo, State of California, as provided in said act.

Adopted September 15th, 1913.

N. J. Cooley — Silas H. Reynolds

W. R. Ford — J. H. Lubken

R. W. Thomas

As Chairman of the Board of Supervisors

Attest: W. L. Hunter

As Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

APPENDIX B: INYO COUNTY LIBRARIANS

Jennie May Brown - appointed September 17, 1913
left on leave of absence May 2, 1916
resigned September 18, 1916

Helen E. Vogelson - appointed Acting Librarian April 11, 1916
resigned September 18, 1916

Blanche Chalfant - appointed October 1, 1916
resigned March 10, 1920

Anne Margrave - appointed March 10, 1920
resigned July 31, 1949

Mary Cavitt - appointed December 15, 1949
resigned 1962

Richard Engen - appointed 1962
resigned 1964

Mary Cavitt - reappointed 1964
resigned 1970

Jeanette Glynn - appointed 1970
resigned June 30, 1976

Margie Cole - appointed Acting Librarian June 30, 1976
resigned October 1, 1976

Jay Ector - appointed October 1, 1976
resigned November 1, 1982

Betty Arasim - appointed Joint Directors November 1, 1982
Marguerite Sowaal- resigned November 30, 1989
Glenna Stansifer - Acting Director November 30, 1989

Glenna Stansifer - appointed June 1, 1990

APPENDIX C: INYO COUNTY LIBRARY BRANCHES

BRANCH	DATE ESTABLISHED	CLOSED
Bishop	1913	Open
Big Pine	1913	Open
Independence	1913	Open
Lone Pine	1914	Open
Manzanar	1914	1926-27*
Darwin	1914-15	1955-56
Keeler	1914-15	1937-38
	1942-43**	1943-44
Haiwee	1920-21	1931-32
	1936-37**	1959-60
Shoshone	1920-21	1990-91***
Coso	1920-21	1930-31
Cartago	1920-21****	1959-60
Ryan mine	1920-21****	1945-46
Death Valley	1920-21****	1938-39
Owenyo	1922-23****	1945-46
Laws	1923-24	1930-31
Tecopa	1923-24***	Open
Olancha	1924-25	1933-34
	1943-44**	1944-45
Leadfield	1924-25	1926-27
Aberdeen	1928-29	1936-37
Furnace Creek	1933-34	Open
CCC Lone Pine	1933-34	1944-45
CCC Cow Creek	1933-34	1944-45
Deep Springs	1933-34	1944-45
Cardinal mine	1936-37	1938-39
Panamint	1937-38	1944-45
Parcher's Camp	1939-40	1942-43
Ruth mine	1940-41	1942-43
Pine Creek mine	1944-45	1958-59
Rovana	1954-55	Open

*All the following are taken from Annual Reports, which are on a July-June fiscal year basis
**Branch reopened
***Shoshone and Tecopa opened and reopened at various times. Dates given are only for first record of opening, and final closure.
****First record in reports. Probably not original opening date.

APPENDIX D: LIBRARY QUESTIONNAIRES

Questionnaire #1 - Circulated in 1978 (responses in parentheses. Total respondents = 331)

TO INYO COUNTY FREE LIBRARY USERS:

The vote on Proposition 13 indicates that citizens wish to save money on property taxes. The library is a service that receives its revenues from the Inyo County general fund, which is supported, in part, by your property taxes.

The library is interested in giving you the best possible service for your money. We would like your opinion on our service and its value to you. Please answer the questions below and feel free to add comments of your own.

	YES	NO
1) IS THE LIBRARY OF VALUE TO YOU?	(331)	(1)
2) DOES THE LIBRARY HAVE TOO MANY SERVICES?	(16)	(291)
3) TOO FEW?	(50)	(183)
4) ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY A FEE FOR LIBRARY SERVICE?*	(191)	(99)

5) IF THE LIBRARY DID NOT CHARGE FOR SERVICES, WOULD YOU CONTINUE TO USE THE LIBRARY THE SAME AMOUNT?_____MORE?_____LESS?_____

6) IF NOT ENOUGH SERVICES ARE PROVIDED, WHAT WOULD YOU WISH TO ADD?

7) IF WE DO TO MUCH, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE US TO CUT OUT? [Here is where the displeasure with the children's librarian was expressed]

8) DO YOU WISH YOUR TAX DOLLARS TO CONTINUE TO PAY FOR THE LIBRARY? YES (307) NO (6)

COMMENTS TO ANY OR ALL OF THE ABOVE:

Questionnaire #2 - Circulated in 1986 (Responses in parentheses. Total respondents = 416)

LIBRARY QUESTIONNAIRE

The library, along with other county departments, has been asked to reduce its budget for Fiscal Year 1986-87. We would find it very helpful to us if you would take a few moments and answer the following questions. If you take this questionnaire home, would you please return it before April 15? You may remain anonymous. Thank you for your time.

Please circle one (or more) answers in each category.

I I use the library primarily for:
- A Checking out books (97.6%)
- B Reading periodicals and newspapers (38.8%)
- C Using the microfilm or microfiche readers (5.2%)
- D Doing research (38.2%)
- E Making Xerox copies (42.1%)
- F Meeting friends (10.7%)

II I come into the library:
- A One or more times per week (70.6%)
- B One or more times per month (26.8%)
- C One or more times per year (2.6%)
- D Mornings (52.5%)
- E Evenings (38.6%)
- F Afternoons (69.8%)
- G Monday H Tuesday I Wednesday J Thursday K Friday
- L Saturday

[Since the branches have different open hours and some are closed some days of the week, this statistic was not tabulated on a county-wide basis]

III I am (am not) aware that the library is able to borrow books and materials from other libraries.
(86.2% were aware; 6.5% were not; 7.3% did not answer)
I use (do not use) this service.
(67.9% do use; 16.8% do not use; 15.3% did not answer)

IV I find the staff:
- A Helpful (99%)
- B Of no help (.4%)
- C Sometimes helpful (.4%)

(.2% did not answer)

V My reading preference(s) is:
- A Non-fiction (65.4%)
- B Best sellers (49.6%)
- C Mysteries (47.6%)
- D Science fiction (25.2%)
- E Westerns (28.0%)
- F Romance (27.4%)
- G Adventure (34.7%)
- H Juvenile (12.9%) [not many children filled out questionnaires]
- I Reference works (37.3%)
- J Paperbacks (40.8%)

VI With limited funds, I would choose to cut:
- A Interlibrary loans (13.3%)
- B New books (4.9%)
- C Hours/personnel (7.2%)
- D Services
- E Other (please specify):
  Magazines/newspapers (7.2%)
  Staff help in finding materials (5.8%)

VII I would (would not) pay a one-dollar service charge for books from other libraries (in addition to postage charges)
(66% would pay)
(25.9% would not pay)
(8.9% did not answer)

VIII Comments:

APPENDIX E: TEXT OF SELECTED LETTERS

#1 - To Whom It May Concern, from John Wardle Dixon (spelling and punctuation unedited), undated

There has been times when the County Library has been of inestimable value to me. One case comes to mind especialy. In the Autumn of 1924 the Sunland Apple Growers Association had sold their apple crop to a Los Angeles buyer. The terms of the sale seemed to be quite satisfactory to the growers. But the buyers when they came to ship the apples began putting apples into a lower grade that the grade to which they belonged. Thereby lessening to amount to be paid to the growers.

At this time I was Agricultural Commissioner for Inyo County. During the shipping of these apples. I had a call from the Sunland growers, asking that I come up and help them in their deal.

Going to the County Library I obtained the book "The Apples of New York" by Beach, the authority on the classification of apples. With its help I was able to prove that the apples that were being placed in the fancy grade were in reality extra fancy.

The contract called for apples colored 85%. But the variety in question is colored 65% normaly and with this amount of color is classified as extra fancy in the California law.

It was no trick in figuring to show that 85% or 65% came well within the color requirements for extra fancy.

With the help of a lawyer and this book, the people of Sunland were saved, probably as much as it took to run the County Library for the year.

(signed) John Wardle Dixon

#2 - To Whom it May Concern, from Bea Ladinig, English Teacher, Bishop Union High School, dated February 21, 1992

As an English teacher at Bishop Union High School, I speak for my entire department when I commend the staff of the Inyo County Library for the indispensable service they provide to the students and to the teachers of Inyo County.

In a remote area where research possibilities are often severely limited, the County Library personnel have made super-human efforts to locate hard-to-find materials for students, to orient students in the intricacies of effective library use, and to minimize the stress that large, seemingly overwhelming research projects often arouse. In addition, our jobs as teachers are significantly enhanced by such a knowledgeable, helpful staff willing to share their considerable expertise.

The County Library is one of the few remaining vestiges of learning (in the true sense of the word) in a society bombarded with more and more information without a way to synthesize all that confronts us.

Please reward the work done by the library staff appropriately on a level commensurate with the invaluable service they perform. The quality of our schools and of our libraries is our only real hope in attempting to remain competitive in a world where learning is crucial to success.

Sincerely,
Bea Ladinig
English Teacher

#3 - To The Honorable Board of Supervisors, from Yan Kinney, President, League of Women Voters of the Eastern Sierra, dated February 24, 1992

Dear Supervisors:

During this time of planning the county budget for 1992-93, the League of Women Voters of the Eastern Sierra wishes to remind the Board that the league still endorses the position it adopted following a study of Inyo County Free Library undertaken during 1976 and updated in 1979.

This position states that the League of Women Voters of the Eastern Sierra "supports measures which will improve and extend the basic library services available to Inyo County residents of all ages, and which will meet the minimum standards adopted by the American Library Association."

Traditionally, during difficult economic times, public libraries are more heavily used both for affordable recreation and for continuing education particularly as it relates to retraining for a changing job market. The increasing use of Inyo County libraries is following this pattern.

The league also would like to remind the Board that while clerical skills are necessary for all employees in small public libraries, the broadest possible educational background is also necessary to give the public adequate assistance with their reference questions. We hope that the Board will take this into consideration in setting salary scales. We would appreciate the Board's consideration of bringing library salaries at least up to the level paid commensurate clerical positions in the county. The league feels that Inyo County is very fortunate in the good quality of its present library staff.

The league wishes to thank the Board for their support of the library during difficult years in the past. We are especially appreciative of improvements made in staffing, number of hours open to the public, and the quality of the book collection. We hope that these gains will not be lost.

Sincerely yours,
Yan Kinney, President

APPENDIX F: COMPARATIVE CIRCULATION STATISTICS BY DECADE

Decade	Collection	Circulation	County Population
1913 -	983	13,246	6,974
1920	12,341	31,958	7,031
Change	+1,155%	+141%	+.82%
1920 -	12,341	31,958	7,031
1930	23,767	51,294	6,604
Change	+48%	+60.5%	-6%
1930 -	23,767	51,294	6,604
1940	37,919	62,117	6,555
Change	+60%	+21%	-.74%
1940 -	37,919	62,117	6,555
1950	48,812	66,074	7,625
Change	+29%	+6%	+16%
1950 -	48,812	66,074	7,625
1960	55,460	102,208	11,658
Change	+14%	+55%	+53%
1960* -	55,460	102,208	11,658
1970*	49,939	92,496	13,972
Change	-10%	-10%	+20%
1970 -	49,939	92,496	13,972
1980	71,262	138,712	18,850
Change	+43%	+50%	+35%
1980 -	71,262	138,712	18,850
1990	70,890	129,911	18,450
Change	-.5%	-6%	-2%

*This decade saw the discontinuance of service to the schools